Nietzsche and the psychological type of the Redeemer [*]

Allan Davy Santos Sena[**]

Abstract: The diagnosis of the psychological type of the Redeemer, classified through the *terminus* “idiot”, become more clear when view as a counterpoint of the concepts “hero” and “genius” used by Renan in his historic explanation of the Jesus figure, as well as been directly influenced by the reading of the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.
Key-words: Psychological types, Idiot, Hero, Genius

In the section 24 of *The Antichrist*[1] (AC, p. 592 – KSA 6, p. 191), Nietzsche shows that is necessary to postulate two principles for the solution “of the problem of the genesis of Christianity”. The first principle is about the “soil out it grew”, that means, the christianity as a logic consequence of the judaism. The second principle is “the psychological type of the Galilean is still recognizable; but only in its complete degeneration (which is at the same time a mutilation and an overloading with alien features) could it serve as that for it has been used – as the type of a Redeemer of mankind” (*Ibidem*). This is a clear indication of the aim and method employed by Nietzsche in his reconstitution of the Jesus figure. As main purpose, Nietzsche indicates the recognize of the psychological type of the Redeemer, by which, joined with the demonstration of the first principle, the genesis of the christianity can be acknowledge. As methodoloy, Nietzsche departs from a double procedure that consist in: to restitute to the psychological type of Jesus the traces that was subtracted from him and, at the same time, to remove thoses that was unduly added to him.

According to Nietzsche, the same subtraction and addition of traces that has operated a distortion in the Jesus figure was what has prevented the success of the attempt of Renan to reveal the authentic historic figure of Jesus. In his work *Life of*

---

[*] This paper has been presented in the “Colóquio Internacional Nietzsche crítico da modernidade”, Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), São Paulo, Brazil, September, 2009.

[**] Graduating in Master’s degree of Philosophy in UNICAMP (allandavy@hotmail.com).

[1] Cf. NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. “The Antichrist”. In: _____. **The portable Nietzsche**. Selected and translated, with an introduction, prefaces and notes by Walter Kaufman. Nova York: Vinking Penguin, 1982.

Jesus[2]*,* Renan has tried through hypothesis and conjectures to obtain a concise and coherent picture of the life and teachings of Jesus, providing a image more ordained and expressive of what the Gospels narrates. However, although Renan has used a method similiar to that adopted by Nietzsche and also has approach to many results which the philosopher will share, the historian's utilization of the concepts "hero" and "genius" to explain the character of Jesus are both rejected by Nietzsche as the more grotesque mistake in psychological matters. Thereby, Nietzsche will counterpoint the Renan's explanation about the Jesus figure through the terminus "idiot". Nietzsche thought, thus, to diagnose exactly and definitely the psychological type of Jesus. It is important likewise to verify that the employment of the terminus "idiot" by Nietzsche remonts to the Dostoevsky's novel *The idiot,* whose psychological's analysis were always enjoyable to Nietzsche, as well as the Tolstoy's essay *My Religion*, whose defense of an anarquic christianity provided to Nietzsche the evangel´s essense lived by Jesus.

The Renan's methodology in his *Life of Jesus* attempts, like that of Nietzsche, to drive away from the usual scientific procedure which history use to resort at his time. According to him, for the Jesus historical picture become explained it is indispensable to turn to hypothesis and conjectures. In a search of a image more coherent and probable of Jesus life it is necessary appeal, as Nietzsche also do, to intuition. Consequently, in his work, Renan aspire to make a narrative that keep retained not in the quest of the truth, of certainty, of undoubted, of what really happpened, but indeed what, in accordance with the laws of knowledge, it's verissimilar, possible, what could has happened (*Préface de la treizième édition*, p. 18; *Introduction*, p. 34). So, to Nietzsche, Renan's mistake was not so much in his methodological procedures, but indeed in his absence of sensibility in psychological matters.

For Renan, Jesus represents one of the greatest men that had transformed the world's physiognomy in the search of the realization of a big ideal. His aspires shows itself so superior to the lowliness of the commom conscience that he see himself obliged to undertake a fight against the order of things, against those that survive at the expense of the ignorance of the simply of spirit. By this mean, the concept of *hero* will works to explain both the proper character of Jesus and the role tha his life has represented to all

[2] Cf. RENAN, Ernest. « Vie de Jésus ». In : _____.**Histoire des origines du christianisme**. Paris: Robert Laffont, Vol. 1, 1995.

humanity. So Renan firstly indicates that through his originals intuitions Jesus has taked humanity to a new degree of spiritual knowledge, to the establishment of a pure cult, of absolute love, of universal fraternity. His jorney links itself to the astonishing dones of the heros of the past, whose sacrifices had ensured to humanity its more precious advances.

The concept of "genius" has been used by Renan to show the extraordinay means of the ideal that Jesus attempts to accomplish alongside his jorney. As Renan write: "The real world has not end, as Jesus has announced, as his disciples had believed. But it was remodeled, and in a certain sense renewed as Jesus has wanted" [3]. Wherefore, the elevated character of Jesus work can't be attributed, according to Renan, to a mere obsessive dream from a vulgar soul, to a trivial fantasy of someone lost in fruitless wandering. Otherwise, Renan views in Jesus a genius whose original inspirations take the human knowledge and the experience at religions matters to a new and insuperable baseline.

One can say that the reason that leads Nietzsche, in his inquiry of the psychological type of Jesus, to directly confronts Renan was also that the french historian had already enunciated the desire of realize a similar task to that which the philosopher aims to himself. When young, at 1845, Renan, suffering of a grave awareness crisis about his conviction in Christian faith, has writed the essay *Psychological exam of Jesus Christ*[4], wherein he has affirmed: "I wish to analyse Jesus Christ as a psychological and historical fact, to apreciate him, explain him if by chance he is explicable, and, if he is not, get down on my knees and throw me entirely into the arms of God"[5] (*Apud Loc. Cit.*, p. 4). Therefore, an approach between the method used by Renan in *Life of Jesus* and that adopted by Nietzsche in *The Antichrist* is not awkward, because the ambition of the french historian was ever make a historic reconstitution of Jesus supported by psychological remarks. Renan formulates his problem just as follows: "Here is the more simply expression of my problem. To explain if

[3] "*Le monde n'a point fini, comme Jésus l'avait annoncé, comme ses disciples le croyaient. Mais il a été remodelé, et en un sens renouvelé comme Jésus le voulait*" (*Vie de Jésus*, Chap. 17, p. 182).
[4] Cf. Laudyce Rétat, « Introduction ». In: RENAN, Ernest. **Histoire des origines du christianisme**. Paris: Robert Laffont, Vol. 1, 1995.
[5] "*J'entreprends d'analyser Jésus-Christ comme un fait psychologique et historique, de l'apprécier, de l'expliquer s'il explicable, et, s'il ne l'est pas, de tomber à genoux et de jeter tout entre les bras de Dieu*".

it's possible, by the psychological laws, the emergence of Jesus Christ or to associate him with the time and place that he had appeared"[6] (*Ibidem*). Namely, Renan wants to apprehend Jesus from the environment that he lived. Find out how, in accordance to the psychological laws, the redeemer spirit grew up from the contact with a determinate place and time, showing menwhile how preconceived judgements in a latest period can desfigures his character. This is the procedure that the historian displays several times along his explanation about the christianity's origins in *Life of Jesus*. Thereby, the place, the moment, the events, in short, the atmosphere wherein Jesus was inserted, exercises in *Life of Jesus* a decisive importance to the reconstituition of the Redeemers character.

For Nietzsche, on the other hand, what is interesting is only the psychological type of Jesus and how this particular physiological condition establishes his relation with the external environment. So what matters in the Nietzsche's remarks is much more the inner and intrinsic constituition of Jesus and not so much the environment wherein his lived. Thus, the historic reconstituition of the Jesus soul is the first mistake made by Renan in psychological matters. As Nietzsche notices, in a probable reference to the historian: "The attempts I know to read the *history* of a 'soul' out of the Gospels seem to me proof of a contemptible psychological frivolity" (AC § 29, p. 600 – KSA 6, p. 199). The second and more serious mistake of Renan in the psychological level was to has mobilized the concepts *hero* and *genius* to clarify who was Jesus and which is the nature of his work. On that account, Nietzsche declares: "M. Renan, that buffoon in *psychologicis,* has introduced the two most inappropriate concepts possible into his explanation of the Jesus type: the concept of *genius* and the concept of *hero* ('héros')" (AC § 29, p. 600 – KSA 6, p. 199).

The psychological type of Jesus diagnosed by Nietzsche, namely, "idiot", can't be compatible with the notion hero, that is, someone that, as Renan points, chooses to fight in order to make real his ideal, someone that battles, someone tha doesn't accepts, that denies the things as they are and decides to change it. Nothing of this can be adequate to the proper character of Jesus and to the evangel's reality lived by his type: "But if anything is unevangelical it is the concept of the hero. Just the opposite of all wrestlyng, of all feeling-oneself-in-a-struggle, has here become instinct, the incapacity for

[6] "*Voici donc la plus simple expression de mon problème. Expliquer s'il est possible par les lois psychologiques l'apparition de Jésus-Christ ou la rattacher aux temps et aux lieux où il a paru*".

resistance becomes morality here" (*Ibidem*). The non-resistance is a condition of existence for the idiot type, a physiological condition that becomes moral. How to conceive a being whose instinct is never to oppose, in plain struggle with the jewish priestly caste and agaist all the powerfull of the world as Renan wants? "To make a *hero* of Jesus!" (AC § 29, p. 601 – KSA 6, p. 200), exclains Nietzsche. On the contrary, as the philosopher points out in a posthumous fragment: "In his more deeper instincts, Jesus is non-heroic [*unheroisch*]: don't ever fight: who views in him something like a hero, as it does Renan, vulgarized the type till make it unrecognizable" (KSA 13, 14 [38] Spring of 1888). However, Nietzsche acknowledges that the Jesus practise has attacked necessarily the Jewish Law, because has denounced all its cruelty, incoherency, and prejudice, nevertheless, Jesus didn't deliberately striked the jewish church, he couldn't as he didn't have a self constitution for this. Thus, according to Nietzsche, Jesus wasn't aware of the consequences originated from his practice.

"And even more, what a misunderstanding is the word 'genius'!" (*Ibidem*), exclains Nietzsche. The idiot type just knows only a single one reality: his inners experiences. The entire external world is, in its effectiveness, unknown for him. To suppose, as it does Renan, that Jesus has contributed, through originals intuitions and inspirations, to elevates the knownledge paved by others religion founders around the world is, to Nietzsche, a completely nonsense. As the philosopher declares: "Our whole concept, our cultural concept, of 'spirit' has no meaning whatever in the world in which Jesus lives" (AC § 29, p. 601 – KSA 6, p. 200). Therefore, all the conception about the cultivate of the individuality by cultural knowledges acquisitions, namely the notion of cultural formation, do not belongs to the reality wherein the psychologicl type of Jesus inhabits. Everything that this type conceives is original ideed, but in the sense of unique, exclusive, proper, that never belongs to anyone else, that isn't a cultural acquisition nor a fruit of a cultivate of the individuality. The way as the Jesus type interprets the things is originating from a turn-to-himself, from a extreme concern to his more intimate experience, to his *inner*. Therefore, Jesus' conception of the world was not, according to Nietzsche, acquired through a spiritual formation, nor, as has defended Renan, intuited by him as he breaths like no one else the religion knownledge atmosphere of his time, but ideed the result of his perception about what should be the best way to him, that

means, for someone with his constitutions, be in relation with the world in order of experiment the supreme happiness.

Therefore, the psychological type of Jesus diagnosed by Nietzsche in *The Antichrist*, become more clear when one verifies what is the Jesus historical picture elaborated by Renan in his *Life of Jesus*, comparing at the same time the method adopted by Renan with that used by Nietzsche, as well as the results that both had accomplished. For the reason that a careless reading of *The Antichrist* could conduces to the equivocated opinion that the philosopher has been merely ungrateful with an author that leave to him so many revelations concern to the authentic figure of Jesus. However, a more accurate reading shows that, although the similarity between theirs methods and many of theirs results, Nietzsche views in the Renan's Jesus a psychological incogruosness, just because the historian didn't dully pay attention to the traces that has been added and subtracted of the Redeemer psychological type. Thereby, Nietzsche, resorting to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, aims to obtain a more accurate diagnosis. Consequently, it is important to verify how and why the historian describes Jesus as a hero and genius, also indicating what is the Renan's interpretation about both concepts in his philosophical reflections. So it will be possible to visualize in *The Antichrist* the confluence of a tough combat that Nietzsche has engaged against Renan's concepts of *hero* and *genius* since *Human*, *All too Human*. Likewise, the analysis of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's works can enlighten greatly the specific meaning of the *terminus* used by Nietzsche to counterpoint the Renan's position – namely, "idiot" – clarifying the philosopher's diagnosis of the psychological type of the Redeemer.